

NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



SDDVA PARTICIPATES IN YELLOW RIBBON EVENT

SDDVA's field service officers Kevin Bowen and John Madsen participated in the Yellow Ribbon event in Aberdeen this weekend.

It's estimated that 98 soldiers and 35 family members from the South Dakota Army National Guard's Alpha Battery, 1-147th Field Artillery Battalion and 147th Forward Support Company were at the event. The soldiers are home after serving on a 10-month deployment to Europe in support of Operation Atlantic Resolve, which enhanced the U.S. deterrence posture, increased the readiness and responsiveness of U.S. forces in Europe, and supported the collective defense and security of U.S. allies and partners.



FSO Kevin Bowen addressed the group on state and federal benefits. Bowen and Madsen also operated an informational booth affording all to visit with them one on one about benefits and services.



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

VA Home Loans.....	2
153rd Engineer Battalion	3
Blue Water Navy Claims.....	4
Dakotas Regional Office Update .	5
National Park Access.....	6
TRICARE Open Enrollment	7
TRICARE Open Enrollment	8
VA Travel Claims	9
VA Health Records.....	10
SD Cares Act.....	11
Upcoming Events.....	12

VA GUARANTEES MORE THAN ONE MILLION HOME LOANS IN RECORD YEAR

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced it achieved a record year in its [home loan program](#), by guaranteeing more than 1.2 million home loans in fiscal year 2020, totaling more than \$363 billion, to help veterans afford homeownership.

This record loan volume equates to approximately 3,200 loans per day and represents the most home loans guaranteed in a single year in the history of the program.

Established as part of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, or "G.I. Bill," the VA Home Loan Program's mission is to help veterans purchase and retain their homes. This includes the opportunity to re-finance home loans under favorable loan terms.

"Accomplishing what our employees and lenders have achieved in 2020 would've been unimaginable years ago, let alone when this program was first created more than 75 years ago," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "The VA has now backed more than 25 million home loans since the program's inception and this record is indicative of the level of support we provide veterans in helping them attain the American dream."

VA-guaranteed loans are made by private lenders. VA's guaranty effectively eliminates the need for a down payment, helping veterans afford home ownership.

Veterans must meet eligibility requirements and qualify for the loan amount based on their credit and income. The VA encourages veterans to explore VA home loan options by approaching various lenders to compare loan costs and interest rates.

The VA advocates for veterans by limiting fees that lenders can charge and monitoring for unscrupulous lending practices. The VA's advocacy, along with its minimum property requirements and flexible and sensible credit standards, help protect veterans' and taxpayers' interests.

Additionally, the VA has the authority to intervene if a veteran has [trouble making mortgage payments](#). The VA can work directly with the veteran and the mortgage company to seek a mutually beneficial resolution and avoid foreclosure, whenever possible. Through such loan servicing efforts, the VA assisted almost 120,000 borrowers avoid foreclosure in fiscal year 2020. These actions saved taxpayers over \$3.4 billion in avoided claim payments.

In response to the COVID-19 national emergency, the VA continues to provide new ways to assist veterans. Borrowers who are experiencing a financial hardship due to COVID-19 can contact their mortgage company directly or call 877-827-3702 to speak with a VA home loan specialist.

Eligible veterans can obtain a certificate of eligibility (COE) for VA home loan benefits through [eBenefits](#) or by contacting their preferred lender.

More information on the [VA Home Loan Program](#), loan volumes by [state](#) and [county](#) and a [video](#) are available through these links.

153RD ENGINEER BATTALION FIRST IN STATE TO CONDUCT NEW QUALIFICATION COURSE

Soldiers from the South Dakota National Guard's 153rd Engineer Battalion were the first unit in the state to tackle the U.S. Army's new individual weapons qualification course at Camp Ripley, Minnesota, Oct. 3-4.

The new course replaces the previous annual marksmanship qualification standards with one that requires soldiers to engage targets faster and to operate as they would in combat. The course prepares soldiers to fire their M16 rifle or M4 carbine in positions they may find themselves in during an engagement with the enemy.

Rather than having magazines pre-positioned and receiving instructions from a range tower on when to change firing positions or magazines, soldiers are now changing magazines in the midst of changing positions, which is much more realistic to how they are expected to react in a firefight.

The new qualification course now includes four firing positions, or tables, where soldiers will engage 40 pop-up targets at varying distances. The course now also includes a barricade for supported positions.

Soldiers start out in the standing position for one target and quickly transition to the prone unsupported position for nine targets. Next, they move to the prone supported position for 10 targets and then transition up to the kneeling supported position for another 10 targets. Finally, soldiers stand in the supported position for the last 10 targets.

The soldiers started out in the crawl phase being introduced to the new firing positions with the Engagement Skills Trainer (EST) 2000, a virtual weapons simulator computer system. The soldiers worked on their shot zeroing/grouping, shooting in a gas mask, and night fire.

Next, they moved to the zero range, where for the first time they are required to not only have a good zero but a good shot grouping to be able to move onto the qualification range. Once on the qualification range, soldiers are issued four magazines loaded with 10 rounds each, which are placed into their magazine pouches.

The soldiers then move to an individual firing lane to begin the course. The course takes about four minutes to complete and includes engaging both single and multiple targets, has no administrative calls to switch magazines or move positions, and soldiers have to be ready to correct a weapon malfunction, should they occur.

Soldiers still earn three different proficiencies in marksmanship. To pass, soldiers have to score 23 out of 40, make 23 to 29 for marksman, 30 to 35 for sharpshooter, and 36 to 40 for expert.



VA REACHES MILESTONE, COMPLETING NEARLY HALF OF BLUE WATER NAVY DISABILITY CLAIMS RECEIVED SINCE BEGINNING OF YEAR

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced it has decided more than 34,000 Blue Water Navy disability claims under the [Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019](#), effective Jan. 1, — which extends the presumption of exposure to herbicides such as [Agent Orange](#) to veterans who served in the offshore waters of the Republic of Vietnam during the Vietnam War.

As of Sept. 30, the VA has processed 34,415 (48%) of 69,570 claims received, of which 24,328 (71%) have been granted — awarding more than \$664 million in retroactive benefits to eligible veterans and families.

“It’s important we ensure Blue Water Navy Veterans and their families receive the benefits they’ve earned,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “As a result, the VA will continue to get the word out via our social media channels, PSAs and VSOs — to ensure every veteran who is eligible applies as soon as possible.”

The VA also collaborated with the [National Archives and Records Administration](#) to digitize all Navy and Coast Guard deck logs for ships with known Vietnam service. Digitization of the Navy deck logs was completed in December 2019 and Coast Guard deck logs were completed in September. As part of the agreement, the VA provided digital images of the deck logs to NARA to make digitally available in the [National Archives Catalog](#). Veterans may contact inquire@nara.gov if the deck log they are seeking is not available in the National Archives Catalog.

If your claim was denied, click here on how to [appeal a VA claim decision](#).

For assistance in filling a claim, Veterans may contact approved [Veterans Service Organizations](#).

Learn more about [Agent Orange exposure and VA disability compensation](#) or call 800-827-1000 for more information.



NATIONAL ARCHIVES

UPDATE FROM DAKOTAS REGIONAL OFFICE DIRECTOR

Good afternoon fellow veteran advocates!

I was hopeful the Regional Office would be able to open to the public earlier this month and was recently hopeful November 2nd would be our date for seeing our veterans in person again. Unfortunately, this Pandemic is not cooperating with those hopes. Due to the recent uptick in cases and positivity rate, almost 1,000 additional cases today (Oct. 28) and a positivity rate of almost 42% today (Oct. 28) in Minnehaha county, I regret to let you know we are going to have to postpone seeing the public.

Again, I thank you for your flexibility and patience while we keep our veteran and employee health interests a top priority.

I will, of course, keep each of you posted as we, hopefully, progress to a healthier situation in our community.

Thanks again for all you do for our veterans and their families and let me know if there is anything that VBA can do to make this unusual situation better for our veterans and their families.



Shawn Bohn, Dakotas Regional Office Director
(605) 333-6839



GOLD STAR FAMILIES AND VETERANS GRANTED FREE ACCESS TO NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM

In support of America's military members and families, U.S. Secretary of the Interior David L. Bernhardt announced at the Iowa Gold Star Museum that Gold Star Families and U.S. military veterans will be granted free access to national parks, wildlife refuges and other Federal lands managed by the Department of the Interior starting on Veterans Day (Nov. 11) this year and every day onward.

For purposes of this program, a veteran is identified as an individual who has served in the United States Armed Forces, including the National Guard and Reserves, and is able to present one of the following forms of identification:

- Department of Defense Identification Card
- Veteran Health Identification Card (VHIC)
- Veteran ID Card
- Veterans designation on a state-issued U.S. driver's license or identification card

Gold Star Families are next of kin of a member of the United States Armed Forces who lost his or her life in a "qualifying situation," such as a war, an international terrorist attack, or a military operation outside of the United States while serving with the United States Armed Forces.

Entrance fees for the National Park Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and standard amenity recreation fees for the Bureau of Land Management and the Bureau of Reclamation sites will be waived for veterans and Gold Star Families. They will have free access to approximately 2,000 public locations spread out across more than 400 million acres of public lands, which host activities to fit any lifestyle, from serene to high octane, including hiking, fishing, paddling, biking, hunting, stargazing and climbing.


Many Department managed lands have direct connections to the American military, such as frontier forts, Cold War sites, battlefields, national cemeteries, and memorials. These special places pay tribute to our veterans and serve as reminders of their courage and sacrifice throughout the history of our nation, from Minuteman National Historic Park where colonists stood in defense of their rights, to Yellowstone National Park, which was protected from vandalism and poaching by the 1st U.S. Cavalry before the National Park Service was established, to Mount Rushmore where modern warriors attend reenlistment ceremonies.

The Interagency America the Beautiful National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass Program already includes a free annual pass for active duty members of the U.S. Military and their dependents. Other free or discounted passes are available for persons with permanent disabilities, fourth grade students, volunteers, and senior citizens age 62 years or older.

The Department also offers free entrance days for everyone throughout the year to mark days of celebration and commemoration including the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr., National Public Lands Day, Veterans Day, and the signing of the Great American Outdoors Act.



New TRICARE Select Fees for Group A Retirees

 **You're in Group A** if you or your sponsor's initial enlistment or appointment occurred before Jan. 1, 2018.

Congress directed the Defense Health Agency to implement TRICARE Select Group A retired enrollment fees in the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act. Effective Jan. 1, 2021, TRICARE Select Group A retired beneficiaries will be **required to pay TRICARE Select enrollment fees**. This must be done via allotment, where feasible.



This is a change. TRICARE Select Group A retired beneficiaries have not paid enrollment fees for TRICARE Select previously.



There is no change for TRICARE Select Group B* beneficiaries. They currently pay enrollment fees.

*You're in Group B if you or your sponsor's initial enlistment or appointment occurred on or after Jan. 1, 2018.



The following TRICARE Select Enrollment fees are effective **Jan. 1, 2021**:

Enrollment Fees:

Individual:

- Monthly enrollment fee: **\$12.50**
- Annual enrollment fee: **\$150**

Family:

- Monthly enrollment fee: **\$25**
- Annual enrollment fee: **\$300**

Deductibles:

\$150 Individual/\$300 Family

Catastrophic Cap:

\$3,500 (Increased from \$3,000)



What Do I Need To Know?

If you're a TRICARE Select Group A retiree and you want to keep your TRICARE Select coverage, you must take action. **Starting Jan. 1, 2021, you'll need to pay monthly enrollment fees for you and your family.** You'll need to set up a monthly allotment with your regional contractor. Your monthly allotment will start on Jan. 1, 2021.

If you don't act by the end of open season, you'll be disenrolled from TRICARE Select due to non-payment. **TRICARE Open Season ends on Dec. 14, 2020.** You'll get a letter on milConnect notifying you of your disenrollment.

You'll have **90 days** from your disenrollment date to request reinstatement. If you don't act, you'll only be able to get care from a military hospital or clinic if space is available. This means you're responsible for all civilian health care costs.



To learn more, visit: www.tricare.mil/SelectEnrollmentFees

TRICARE OPEN ENROLLMENT

Check your mailbox or your inbox. If you received a letter similar to the one on this page, you should act on it now.

For more information, we encourage you to visit the three links below.



**Check Your
Mailbox....**

Dear TRICARE Select Beneficiary:

As required by law, TRICARE is introducing enrollment fees for Group A retired beneficiaries enrolled in TRICARE Select coverage. You're currently enrolled in **TRICARE Select**. You're also a Group A retired beneficiary. Being in Group A means you or your sponsor enlisted or were commissioned before January 1, 2018.

You and your family members now must pay a TRICARE Select monthly enrollment fee. Your monthly enrollment fee payment will start on January 1, 2021.

- For an individual plan, you'll pay \$12.50 per month.
- For a family plan, you'll pay \$25.00 per month.

If you want to keep your TRICARE Select coverage, you must act. You must set up a monthly enrollment fee payment. You must do this during TRICARE Open Season. TRICARE Open Season starts on November 9, 2020. And it ends on December 14, 2020. Once you set up your monthly enrollment fee payment, your TRICARE Select coverage will continue in 2021, as long as you remain eligible.

To set up your monthly enrollment fee payment, call Health Net Federal Services, LLC at 844-866-WEST (9378).

If you don't set up your monthly enrollment fee payment by December 14, 2020, then:

- Your last day of TRICARE Select coverage will be December 31, 2020.
- You'll only be able to get care at a military hospital or clinic if space is available. This will start on January 1, 2021. You'll still be able to use the military pharmacy. Visit www.tricare.mil/mtf.

If you get your retirement or other pay from a military pay center, then you'll pay your TRICARE Select fees via a monthly allotment, where feasible. If you don't get your retired pay through a military pay center or if your retired pay doesn't cover the monthly enrollment fee, then you'll pay your fees by a recurring credit or debit card transaction. You can also pay your monthly fees through electronic funds transfer (EFT). Your EFT must be from a U.S. bank.

Dental and vision plans may be available through the Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program. This is offered by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management. Learn more at www.benefeds.com.

Your Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS) record has your family status, service status, and other information. You must keep your DEERS record up to date. If you don't keep your DEERS record up to date, then you'll miss key information and enrollment deadlines. Visit www.tricare.mil/deers.

Sincerely,

Enrollment Department
Health Net Federal Services, LLC

<https://tricare.mil/Plans/Enroll/Select/SelectFeesFAQs>

<https://www.tricare-west.com/content/hnfs/home/tw/bene/enroll/allotment.html>

<https://tricare.mil/SelectEnrollmentFees>

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

FILING VA TRAVEL CLAIMS: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



WHAT IS VA TRAVEL CLAIM REIMBURSEMENT?

VA travel pay reimbursement through the Beneficiary Travel program pays eligible Veterans back for mileage and other travel expenses to and from approved health care appointments.

AM I ELIGIBLE FOR TRAVEL PAY?

VA offers two types of travel pay reimbursement: general health care travel and special mode transportation. As a Veteran, you may be eligible for one or both. A Veteran may be eligible for beneficiary travel services if the following criteria are met:

- have a service-connected (SC) rating of 30 percent or more, or
- are traveling for treatment of a SC condition, or
- receive a VA pension, or your income does not exceed the maximum annual VA pension rate, or
- are traveling for a scheduled compensation or pension, or if not otherwise eligible as noted above, and
- have a vision impairment, spinal cord injury or disorder, or a double or multiple amputation who's travel in connection with care provided through a VA special disabilities rehabilitation program (including programs provided by spinal cord injury centers, blind rehabilitation centers and prosthetics rehabilitation centers) if such care is provided on an in-patient basis or during a period in which you are provided with temporary lodging at a facility of the Department to make such care more accessible.

WHAT'S THE FASTEST WAY TO SUBMIT A NEW CLAIM AND GET FASTER PROCESSING OF A PENDING CLAIM?

For new claims and any pending claims, log in to Beneficiary Travel Self-Service System (BTSSS) and create a profile. An updated profile is required now to file a claim online and to process previously submitted kiosk and hard copy claims. Visit AccessVA and select the Veteran Travel Claim Entry icon to get started. <https://access.va.gov>.

HOW DO I SUBMIT A TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENT CLAIM FOR GENERAL HEALTH CARE TRAVEL USING BTSSS?

VA is phasing in a new web-based portal to submit and process beneficiary travel claims at select locations. The portal, BTSSS, is VA's preferred method to accept travel reimbursement claims. Once implemented, claims submitted using the kiosks will be phased out. However, hard-copy submissions will still be available. Check with your Beneficiary Travel Office to find out when the BTSSS is available at your facility. To submit a claim, visit <https://access.va.gov>, select the Veteran Travel Claim Entry icon, and logon using a DS Log on Level 2 account. Log in to BTSSS and create your profile today to allow faster processing of any pending claims.

WHAT IS A DS LOG ON LEVEL 2 ACCOUNT?

A DS Logon is an ID issued by Department of Defense (DoD) that allows Veterans and caregivers to access many VA and DoD sites with one user username and password. A DS Log on Level 2 account is required to file a travel claim using BTSSS.

WHY SHOULD I USE BTSSS?

BTSSS automates the claims process to ensure timely processing and payment of travel reimbursement claims. With BTSSS, turnaround time to evaluate and settle a claim is generally less than 5 days. BTSSS allows Veterans and caregivers to submit claims 24/7, 365 days a year from a computer or mobile device. It also allows users to electronically track the status of a claim request.

CAN I GET HELP TO FILE MY FIRST CLAIM?

There are several sources of help to file a claim. Eligible Veterans and caregivers may get help from a travel clerk at the Sioux Falls VA Health Care System at 605-373-4196, refer to the BTSSS user's guide at <https://www.va.gov/health-care/get-reimbursed-for-travel-pay>, or contact the Beneficiary Travel Help Desk at 1-855-574-7292.

VA LAUNCHES NEW ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORD SYSTEM IN PACIFIC NORTHWEST

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) began using its new electronic health record (EHR) system Oct. 24 at select VA facilities in the Pacific Northwest and Las Vegas, marking the beginning of a transformation in how VA delivers care to veterans.

More than 24,000 veterans receiving primary care at the Mann-Grandstaff VA Medical Center (VAMC) in Spokane, Washington, will benefit from the VA's first full implementation of the new software, which provides VA health care staff with a modern EHR that is interoperable with the Department of Defense (DOD), U.S. Coast Guard and community care partners.

"This milestone is the result of 27 months of planning, collaboration and steadfast work by our Electronic Health Record Modernization (EHRM) team, the Cerner team, leaders, and staff across the VA and our partners within DOD," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "This is an historic step toward creating a seamless health care experience for veterans, from the time they enter the military through their care at the VA."

The new system puts VA and DOD on a single electronic health record, which improves veterans' health care experiences by eliminating their need to keep or carry paper records detailing care received from either department. Care providers from both departments will be able to view, update and securely exchange patient data in the new system, which also enables increased information sharing with providers in the communities where veterans live and receive care.

In addition to the launch at the Mann-Grandstaff VAMC and its four community-based outpatient clinics located in Wenatchee, Washington; Libby, Montana; Coeur d'Alene, Idaho; and Sandpoint, Idaho. VA also began using the new system at the West Consolidated Patient Account Center, the VA business operations facility in Las Vegas that supports billing for the Pacific Northwest.

The new EHR system complements VA's longstanding health record system, Veterans Health Information Systems and Technology Architecture, also known as VistA, and Computerized Patient Record System at these sites. The EHRM program will continue rolling out the new software until it is in place nationwide at all VA facilities by 2028.

Learn more about [VA's EHRM program](#).



SD CARES HOUSING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Temporary Rental, Mortgage or Utility Assistance

WHAT IS THE SD CARES HOUSING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM?

The SD CARES Housing Assistance Program provides funds to assist South Dakota residents with housing expenses. If you have been financially impacted due to COVID-19, the SD CARES Housing Assistance Program (SDCHAP) may provide temporary rental, mortgage, or utility assistance.

Assistance provided is not a loan and does not have to be paid back. Payment is made directly to the landlord, mortgage servicer or utility provider on the applicant's behalf. Funding amount is based on need with a maximum of \$1,500 per month.

Eligible applicants can earn up to 115 percent of the area median income (AMI) and funds can be used to cover arrears back to March 1 and current housing expenses that a household is unable to pay. Assistance can only be provided through December 30, 2020.

PROGRAM INFORMATION



ALLOCATION AMOUNT
\$10,000,000



RECIPIENTS
South Dakotans who have lost income due to COVID-19 and owe past due rent, mortgage or utilities.



MAXIMUM GRANT
\$1500 per month



APPLICATION DEADLINE
December 18, 2020 or sooner if funding is expended.

DO I QUALIFY?

- ☒ Owe past due rent, mortgage or utilities or unable to pay current housing expenses due to being financially impacted by COVID-19;
- ☒ Have incomes at or below 115% of AMI;
 - 1 person - \$62,675
 - 2 person - \$71,530
 - 3 person - \$80,500
 - 4 person - \$89,470
 - 5 person - \$96,600
 - 6 person - \$103,730
 - 7 person - \$110,975
 - 8 person - \$118,105
- ☒ Be a South Dakota resident;
- ☒ Meet all program criteria; and
- ☒ Ensure a complete application

HOW TO APPLY

Potential applicants can visit sdcareshousingassistance.com to verify eligibility requirements and to begin the application process. Online applications are mobile friendly and will be processed by partnering agencies throughout the state. Should applicants not have internet access, partnering agencies listed below are available to help households complete an application.

PARTNERS

Helpline Center
 Codington County Welfare
 Four Bands Community Fund, Inc.
 Grow South Dakota
 Inter-Lakes Community Action Partnership
 Lakota Funds
 Mazaska Owecaso Otipi Financial
 NeighborWorks Dakota Home Resources
 Pennington County Health & Human Services
 Rural Office of Community Services, Inc.
 Western SD Community Action



HAVE QUESTIONS:

SDHDA @ 800.540.4241 | Helpline Center @ 211



UPCOMING EVENTS

Nov 7—BHSU Hero Appreciation Game—Lyle Hare Stadium—Spearfish—1:00 pm (MT)
 Nov 11—SSG Jason W. Montefering and SGT Jeremiah Boehmer Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—Parkston High School Auditorium—9:00 am (CT)
 Nov 11—State Offices are closed
 Nov 13—VABHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Domiciliary Auditorium—Hot Springs VAMC—10:00 am (MT)
 Nov 13—Virtual Legal Clinic—9:00 am—5:00 pm (CT)
 Nov 26-27—State Offices are closed
 Dec 8—Governor's State of the Budget Address—1:00 pm (CT)
 Dec 14—Wreath Laying Ceremony—Capitol Lake Flaming Fountain—Pierre—11:00 am (CT)
 Dec 24-25—State Offices are closed
 Jan 12—Governor's State of the State Address—1:00 pm (CT)
 Jan 13—SDDVA/SD Veterans Council Legislative Reception



Audry Ricketts, Public Information Officer

South Dakota Department of the Military <https://military.sd.gov/default.html>

South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov>

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